

CATHERINE OF SIENA: CONTEMPLATIVE MYSTIC

June 18, 2009 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

The following is excerpted from the book *CONTEMPLATIVE MYSTICISM: A POWERFUL ECUMENICAL BOND*, which is available from Way of Life Literature. Contemplative mysticism, which originated with Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox monasticism, is permeating every branch of Christianity today, including the Southern Baptist Convention. In this book we document the fact that Catholic mysticism leads inevitably to a broadminded ecumenical philosophy and to the adoption of heresies. For many, this path has led to interfaith dialogue, Buddhism, Hinduism, universalism, pantheism, panentheism, even goddess theology. One chapter is dedicated to exposing the heresies of Richard Foster: "Evangelicalism's Mystical Sparkplug." We describe the major contemplative practices, such as centering prayer, visualizing prayer, Jesus Prayer, *Lectio Divina*, and the labyrinth. We look at the history of Roman Catholic monasticism, beginning with the Desert Fathers and the Church Fathers, and document the heresies associated with it, such as its sacramental gospel, rejection of the Bible as sole authority, veneration of Mary, purgatory, celibacy, asceticism, allegorical interpretation of Scripture, and moral corruption. We examine the errors of contemplative mysticism, such as downplaying the centrality of the Bible, ignoring the fact that multitudes of professing Christians are not born again, exchanging the God of the Bible for a blind idol, ignoring the Bible's warnings against associating with heresy and paganism, and downplaying the danger of spiritual delusion.

A major section of the book is entitled "A Biographical Catalog of Contemplative Mystics" which deals with dozens of the current-day contemplative promoters as well as the ancient "saints" and mystics that are being resurrected today, including the following:

Angela of Foligno, Anthony the Great, Augustine, Benedict of Nursia, Bernard of Clairvaux, Ken Blanchard, Bonaventure, Brother Lawrence, Catherine of Genoa, Catherine of Siena, Larry Crabb, Anthony De Mello, Dominic, Meister Eckhart, Tilden Edwards, James Finely, Richard Foster, Matthew Fox, Frances de Sales, Francis of Assisi, Alan Griffiths, Madame Guyon, Hildegard of Bingen, Ignatius of Loyola, Willigis Jager, John of the Cross, William Johnston, Julian of Norwich, Thomas Keating, Morton Kelsey, Thomas a Kempis, Sue Monk Kidd, Peter Kreeft, John Main, Brennan Manning, Thomas Merton, J.P. Moreland, Henri Nouwen, Basil Pennington, Eugene Peterson, Karl Rahner, Thomas Ryan, William Shannon, Henri Le Saux, Philip St. Roman, David Steindl-Rast, Henry Suso, John Michael Talbot, Johann Tauler, Wayne Teasdale, Pierre Teilhard, Teresa of Avila, Teresa of Lisieux, Majorie Thompson, Phyllis Tickle, Robert Webber, Dallas Willard, John Yungblut

The book contains an extensive index.

482 pages, \$19.95

CATHERINE OF SIENA (1347-80) was born Catherine Benincasa, in Siena, Italy. She was declared a saint in 1461 by Pope Pius II and a Doctor of the Church in 1970 by Pope Paul VI. Pope John Paul II declared her one of the patron saints of Europe.

Her body is reserved in the Saint Mary Minerva Church in Rome, while her head is enshrined in the basilica of St. Dominic in Bologna, Italy.

She took a vow of virginity to Christ at age seven and lived in near solitude, refusing her mother's attempts to encourage her to live a normal childhood. When her mother tried to get her to dress in an attractive manner, she shaved off her hair. When her mother took her to a spa, she scalded her skin by

exposing herself to the hottest geothermal vents. Biographer Kathryn Harrison says, “She allowed herself not one mortal pleasure.”

At age 16 she took the black habit of the Dominican Third Order. She claimed to have received her habit personally from Dominic, though he had been dead for a century.

She spent three years in solitary prayer in a little room, nine by three feet, speaking only to her Catholic confessor. She lived long periods of time with no food or water except the wine and wafers of the Mass. She scourged herself three times a day with an iron chain. She allowed herself only one-half hour of sleep every other day on a hard board. She wore a hairshirt and an iron-spiked girdle. “... her self-punishment left her body covered with gaping wounds, which she blithely referred to as her ‘flowers’” (*The Way of the Mystics*, p. 81).

She started having mystical experiences at age six when she allegedly saw a vision of Christ seated with Peter, Paul, and John. She could see “guardian angels” (Catholicsaints.org). She allegedly saw Jesus often in vision and talked face to face with Him. She claimed that he personally gave her the elements of the Mass and a new robe.

She even claimed to have exchanged hearts with Jesus and in about 1366 she experienced a “mystical marriage” with Him in which He appeared with “his mother and the heavenly host” and told her that she was his bride. Mary took her by the hand and led her to Christ, who placed a ring upon her finger and “espoused her to Himself.”

Later she “besought her Divine Bridegroom to let her bear the punishment for all the sins of the world, and to receive the sacrifice of her body for the unity and renovation of the Church” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1917).

In 1370 she supposedly had intense visions of heaven, hell, and purgatory. That she saw “purgatory” is evidence of her unquestioning devotion to Catholic myths and heresies and of the fact that she was dealing with demons and not with the Spirit of God. “During the summer of 1370 she received a series of special manifestations of Divine mysteries, which culminated in a prolonged trance, a kind of mystical death, in which she had a vision of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven...” (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1908).

She depended upon these visions and voices for personal guidance rather than the Bible. After a long time of feeling abandoned by God she asked him, “O Lord, where wert Thou when my heart was so sorely vexed with foul and hateful temptations,” and allegedly a voice replied, “Daughter, I was in thy heart, fortifying thee by grace” (“Saint Catherine of Siena,” EWTN Library).

Her book *The Dialogue* contains alleged intimate conversations she had with God, asking Him questions and receiving His answers. John Talbot says, “For anyone who has ever wanted to sit down and have a chat with God, the resulting book provides fascinating insights into Christian faith” (*The Way of the Mystics*, p. 89).

In fact, Catherine was deluded by Satan posing as an angel of light. We have the complete revelation of God in the Bible, and it ends with a solemn warning not to add to it (Revelation 22:18-19). Further, Catherine’s visions contradict the Bible. For example, her God instructed her to honor the Catholic priesthood and to respect the sacraments, but neither of these are New Testament institutions.

In 1375 she allegedly received the “stigmata,” which was the impression of the crucifixion wounds of Christ (pierced hands and feet, crown of thorns) in her own body. This occurred while she was meditating on a crucifix during Mass. She described it as follows:

“I saw the crucified Lord coming down to me in a great light. ... Then from the marks of His most sacred wounds I saw five blood-red rays coming down upon me, which were directed towards the hands and feet

and heart of my body. Wherefore, perceiving the mystery, I straightway exclaimed, 'Ah! Lord, my God, I beseech Thee, let not the marks appear outwardly on the body.' ... So great is the pain that I endure sensibly in all those five places, but especially within my heart, that unless the Lord does a new miracle, it seems not possible to me that the life of my body can stay with such agony" (King, *Christian Mystics*, p. 85).

"She used to levitate off the floor several times a day and speak in unknown tongues. (It is actually said that when she wanted an early breakfast, the angel used to come and cook it for her)" (*The Charismatic Phenomenon in the Church of Rome*, by Hugh Farrell, former Catholic priest).

She also claimed that when she was too sick to move that the wafer and wine would supernaturally travel to her (*The Way of the Mystics*).

She was dedicated to the unscriptural papacy and was allegedly instrumental in getting it returned to Rome from Avignon, France. She carried on correspondence with Pope Gregory XI and had an audience with him. She also had an audience with Pope Urban VI in Rome.

She died at age 33 "after a prolonged and mysterious agony of three months."

A Catholic myth says that the people of Siena took her head from Rome to Siena, and that when the Roman guards demanded that they open the bag it was miraculously full of rose petals, but once they got to Siena her head reappeared. Thus in Catholic art she is sometimes depicted holding a rose.

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